U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Moldova

Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports - 2008
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Part 1

Moldova is a republic with a form of multiparty parliamentary democracy and an estimated total population of 4.2 million inhabitants; an estimated 533,000 persons live in the secessionist-controlled region of Transnistria. The constitution provides for a multiparty democracy with legislative and executive branches, as well as an independent judiciary. All branches of government are heavily influenced by the presidency. Parliamentary elections in 2005 and nationwide local elections in 2007 generally complied with most international standards for democratic elections. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were reports that security forces beat persons in custody; prison conditions remained harsh; and security forces occasionally harassed and intimidated the political opposition. There were reports of judicial and police corruption, arbitrary detention by police, and occasional illegal searches. The governmentattempted to influence themediaand intimidate journalists, maintained some restrictions on freedom of assembly, and denied official registration to some religious groups. Persistent domestic violence and discrimination against women and children, trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation, discrimination against Roma, limits on workers' rights, and child labor problems were also reported.

Human rights conditions in Transnistria were generally worse. Transnistrian authorities restricted the right of residents to change their government and interfered with the ability of Moldovan citizens to vote in Moldovan elections in towns located in Transnistria and under control of the central government. Transnistrian residents cannot freely put themselves forward as candidates for election, nor can restricted Transnistrian media freely report on candidates or issues. Torture, arbitrary arrest and detention continued to be problems, and prison conditions remained harsh. Transnistrian authorities continued to harass independent media and opposition party leaders; restrict freedom of association, movement, and religion; and discriminate against Romanian speakers.

Part 2

Transformational diplomacy in the country supports development of a more democratic and prosperous country, secure within its recognized borders and ready to become a full partner in the European community. The United States promotes development of democratic institutions and building public trust by helping to curb corruption, promote the rule of law, and encourage an active civil society. The U.S. government supports citizen access to and development of broad-based, objective information sources and public media institutions worthy of the name. The U.S. government also promotes the growth of democratic civil society and adherence to international standards of human rights in the Transnistrian region.

The U.S. government assists members of the country's law enforcement and judicial communities, who remain under-funded and poorly trained. Some elements in these communities on occasion engage in corrupt practices and lack public support and legitimacy. The U.S. goal is to combat transnational trafficking in persons and organized criminal operations in the country, which will continue to harm citizens' safety and rights until police, prosecutors, and the judiciary develop necessary skills, tools and resources. The United States provides training and assistance to the government to revise legislation, improve effectiveness, and increase transparency and accountability. The U.S. government supports the country's anticorruption efforts through the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Threshold Country Program. The U.S. government promotes international efforts to resolve the separatist conflict in the Transnistrian region. On the local level the U.S. government also works with Transnistrian institutions in the region to fight trafficking in persons and provide opportunities for residents to participate in political life.

Part 3

U.S. assistance strengthens government and other democratic institutions by enhancing the rule of law and the role of civil society. Such assistance supported development of more effective local political leadership, an increase in citizen participation in decision making, a more honest and effective legal system, and enhanced citizen confidence in state institutions. U.S. civil society programs have boosted citizens' effectiveness as civic participants.

The United States seeks to increase political competition by assisting political parties to improve their effectiveness at campaigning and build constituent support. A U.S. grant to an independent press association resulted in the publication of a civic and voter education insert in 14 different newspapers over a six-month period. The U.S. government also gave grants to NGOs to monitor the 2007 nationwide campaigns and elections for district councils and mayors. During the election campaign, the ambassador traveled to 17 of 32 districts to encourage open campaigning, media access for all candidates, and the creation of conditions in which informed citizens could make free choices at the ballot box.

In preparation for the autonomous Gagauz region's People's Assembly elections in March 2008 and nationwide parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009, the embassy will provide training through U.S. implementing partners in voter outreach, political campaign techniques, and development of women's and youth groups and local branches.

Part 4

U.S. assistance helped to improve the country's legal system. Training for attorneys in trial advocacy for human rights has increased their ability to challenge human rights abuses. Recommendations provided to the government have improved the content of draft laws affecting criminal cases.

U.S.-funded civil society programs have helped lead to an increase in citizens' awareness of their rights. Citizens now make greater demands on the government to respect those rights and have filed more than 1,700 cases at the European Court for Human Rights. U.S. programs help develop grassroots organizational and advocacy skills to enable communities to identify their most pressing needs and lobby local governments more effectively for assistance to repair schools and roads and to obtain natural gas connections. Sustained U.S. efforts increased the ability of civil society to create mechanisms for cooperation between civil society and government. This has led to more inclusive policymaking and better representation of civic groups' interests across the government. To enhance the country's social capital, the United States trained lawyers and citizens in third-party arbitration procedures, and funded summer camps for youth from all ethnic and religious groups to promote tolerance.

U.S. support also provided assistance to enhance electoral rights. More than 30 NGOs, advocacy groups, and media outlets benefited from U.S. grants to promote citizen participation in governance, train election monitors, and provide objective newspaper and radio news regarding political issues and choices. U.S. grants also trained elected officials to serve better their constituents. In December 2007, for example, the embassy sent eight newly elected small-town mayors to meet U.S. state, local, and federal officials to learn more about democratic governance.

Recognizing the problems associated with religious monopolism, the United States actively supported efforts of unregistered religious groups to gain legal status. The embassy encouraged such groups to use liberalizing provisions of the new religion law to seek registration. The ambassador hosts an annual gathering at his residence for leaders of all religious groups in the country, registered and unregistered, to discuss and encourage religious freedom. To combat human trafficking, the U.S.

government helped authorities create the Center to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which uses a task force approach to investigate and prosecute traffickers and to assist victims. The United States also funded programs to provide at-risk young women with employment skills.

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